## MINUTES OF MEETING State Board of Education March 11, 2008

The March meeting of the State Board of Education was held in the State Board Conference Room, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa. The following Board members were present: Gene Vincent, Rosie Hussey (telephonic), Charlie Edwards, Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, Kameron Dodge, Wayne Kobberdahl, Brian Gentry and Mary Jean Montgomery (telephonic). Max Phillips was absent. Director Judy Jeffrey and staff members Gail Sullivan, Carol Greta, Jeff Berger, Kevin Fangman, Jim Addy, Del Hoover, Brandie Gean, Elaine Watkins-Miller, and Su McCurdy were also present. Others present were Paula Wright, Chariton Community School District; Lisa Oakley, Department of Management; Joe Crozier, Great Prairie Area Education Agency; Eric Hanson, KCCI-TV; Molly Hottle and Reid Forgrave, *Des Moines Register*, Matthew Gillaspie, Piper Jaffray & Company; Bev Bear and Marian Holmes, Russell Community School District parents, and Jacque Chester, Russell Community School District Board member.

#### **State Board Business Meeting**

President Gene Vincent called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.

It was moved by Sister Jude Fitzpatrick and seconded by Wayne Kobberdahl to approve the March agenda as presented.

### **Public Comment**

A public comment written by Doug Bear, Iowa State University graduate and 2003 alumnus of the Russell Community School District was read by Mr. Bob McCurdy, Superintendent, Russell Community School District. This comment was in opposition to the proposed recommendation for agenda item #5, to remove the accreditation of the Russell Community School District.

### **Director Report**

Director Jeffrey invited Jeff Berger, Legislative Liaison, to join her to provide a legislative update on education and related issues.

Jeffrey reported that the School Budget Review Committee (SBRC) met and had identified a large number of school districts with a negative unspent balance. In order to deal with this issue more proactively, the Department will now notify both the superintendent and local board when a district is headed toward a negative unspent balance. The Department will provide technical assistance to these districts in order to help them address this problem much earlier. The SBRC members were clear, however, that if this cannot be resolved, they will continue to recommend districts for a Phase II visit if necessary.

Director Jeffrey stated that she has had many opportunities to discuss the Iowa Core Curriculum and state standards. These occasions included a live radio call-in show, two Rotary Club meetings, superintendents' meetings, Phi Delta Kappa, the Farm Bureau Policy Information Conference and the Iowa Chamber Alliance.

### **Consent Agenda**

The February 6, 2008, State Board Minutes were approved as presented.

# Russell Community School District Phase II Fiscal Review and Accreditation Visit Recommendations

Judy Jeffrey, Director, introduced James Addy, Administrator, Division of School Support and Information; Kevin Fangman, Administrator, Division of PK-12 Education; and Del Hoover, Deputy Division Administrator, Bureau of Accreditation and Improvement Services, who presented the findings from the Phase II fiscal and accreditation review in the Russell Community School District.

In December, the State Board of Education voted to continue the Phase II process in Russell after hearing a report outlining the accreditation and financial concerns found in the district. Great Prairie AEA worked with the school district in December, January and February to help them develop a corrective action plan with deadlines for fixing special education issues and other areas of noncompliance.

Mr. Addy reported that the Phase II accreditation team and Carol Greta met with Superintendent Robert McCurdy and representatives from the Russell School Board on January 21<sup>st</sup> and a timeline for correcting accreditation violations and submitting a workable budget for the 2008-2009 school year was established.

Russell submitted a Phase II Fiscal Corrective Action Plan to the Department on January 29<sup>th</sup>, but it was not acceptable because it did not eliminate the negative unspent balance and did not include financial documentation that had been requested. The district was allowed to submit a second Corrective Action Plan. Following submission of the second plan on February 12, 2008, it was determined that there were still areas of concern and it was also unacceptable. The second plan still showed a negative unspent balance.

Mr. Addy also outlined the details of the special education balances in the fiscal review.

Mr. Addy indicated it was important to note that the fiscal review is linked with the accreditation review because the fiscal portion determines whether there are adequate resources to provide for the accreditation requirements in Chapter 12.

The Phase II team revisited the district the week of February 25-29, 2008, to document corrective actions taken to fix the accreditation citations from the December report. Kevin Fangman, Administrator, Division of PK-12 Education, presented information on the accreditation team review of the Russell Community School District (CSD). He noted that twenty-five days of Department staff time had been spent in the Russell CSD which does not include the time spent by staff of the Great Prairie Area Education Agency providing assistance on the special education corrective action plan. It was a very thorough review by the Department.

Fangman reviewed the DE Review Team report. He stated that many of the concerns from the first and second Phase II visits were the same. Areas of concern included:

- Equity--inconsistent training, policies and procedures
- Access to buildings and programs few changes made; continues to be non-compliant
- Teacher Evaluations--have not aligned district policy and practice with Iowa Code requirements; and Iowa teaching standards
- Teacher Licensure—licensure endorsements and expirations showed some improvement, but some licensure areas remained in noncompliance

- Curriculum—development and age of materials and implementation did not meet requirements
- Offer and teach—waiver requested from Director Jeffrey. Her response included criteria for the District to meet for further Department consideration. Response from Russell CSD in February did not meet the required criteria.
- Budget proposals—remain in noncompliance
- Articulation agreements for CTE—could not be located
- Special Education—Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) were not in compliance. Great Prairie Area Education Agency developed an action plan with the District in the area of special education. The teacher caseload was over the recommended load. Great Prairie AEA offered support and training in this area.

Mr. Fangman completed his accreditation overview and opened the discussion for State Board members to ask questions. After questions and continued Board discussion, Gene Vincent, Board president, invited Superintendent Bob McCurdy to address the Board with any additional comments.

Mr. McCurdy stated he felt the process was unfair and that Russell Community School had been targeted for closure. Mr. McCurdy indicated that health factors for administrative staff and bad weather were significant factors in not meeting the timelines and criteria set out for meeting the Phase II requirements. He emphasized that the District and community want to be in compliance and do a good job with education.

Director Judy Jeffrey commented that the accumulation of much evidence indicated that it would be extremely difficult for the district to meet accreditation standards and balance the budget. She felt the Department staff had spent a great deal of time in the district gathering information in order to make an accurate assessment of the situation. Jeffrey felt the Department staff looked fairly and impartially at the school district and what is expected for the education for our students. Jeffrey recommended to the Board that the accreditation of the Russell Community School District be removed as of July 1, 2008.

Following additional Board discussion, the following action was taken:

**Motion:** It was moved by Charlie Edwards and seconded by Wayne Kobberdahl to remove the accreditation of Russell Community School District as of July 1, 2008, and that the Director of the Department exercise the authority to oversee the merger of the territory, assets and liabilities of the Russell Community School District with one or more contiguous school

districts. It was further moved that the Russell Community School District remain accredited through June 30, 2008, and the local Russell School Board have authority to operate the district through June 30, 2008.

In response to a question from Brian Gentry about the process between now and the school district dissolution to ensure that the students and families receive needed services, Director Jeffrey reviewed the required guidelines the Department and Great Plains Area Education Agency would follow to oversee the merger of the District and to provide assistance to the families and the District. Jeffrey also outlined the work of the Department Merger Committee in completing the many tasks for school district dissolution and meeting the timelines. She also indicated the Open Enrollment deadline would be extended by provision of law for this good cause circumstance.

In reflecting on Superintendent McCurdy's remarks, Board member Charlie Edwards commented that during his tenure on the State Board he had struggled with the issue of local control. Edwards felt that along with local control comes local responsibility and that is the issue in this case. He stated that the State Board cannot take responsibility for every school district in the state of lowa. Local communities need to take that responsibility. When a district is so clearly out of compliance, it is the responsibility of State Board members to vote in favor of this motion. It is difficult because many on the Board feel strongly about small schools and came up through that system. This action is clearly something as a group the Board does not want to do.

Edwards also recommended that the Department look closely at its Phase I accreditation review process. He wondered if some of these compliance issues could have been caught earlier.

Brian Gentry echoed the comments of Mr. Edwards in regard to Phase I. Gentry commented that to the extent possible, the Department should identify potential accreditation problem areas early and communicate effectively with districts to try to help them avoid reaching the position that Russell Community School District has reached.

Wayne Kobberdahl stated that whenever he thinks about an issue like this, he tries to focus on what is best for the students. He felt what has been recommended here is best for students.

**Vote:** A roll call vote was taken: Aye-Hussey, Edwards, Fitzpatrick, Gentry, Kobberdahl, Montgomery, and Vincent. Nay-None. The motion passed.

President Gene Vincent adjourned the meeting at 4:40 p.m.	
Gene E. Vincent	Judy A. Jeffrey, Director and
President	Executive Officer